

# PRESS RELEASE



## House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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### **STATEMENT BY CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE** *Before the House Committee on Budget*

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Spratt and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity for Mr. Skelton and I to appear before you this afternoon to testify on the critical importance of the defense budget at this point in our nation's history.

I realize you have a long day ahead of you, so I will attempt to keep my comments brief and to the point.

Let me begin with the bottom line. It is the strongly-held bi-partisan view of the Armed Services Committee that the funding level requested by the President for the national defense budget function should be the absolute minimum that you consider for inclusion in the Budget Resolution.

You will hear a lot of facts today from our colleagues who will be making a case for their priorities and programs. I would also like to present you with some important facts for your consideration.

I would submit that the most critical fact that you must consider as you sit down to write the budget is this – under our system of government, defense and the national security function are the most fundamental and overriding responsibilities assigned to the federal government by the Constitution. Nothing else comes close.

I raise this because the budget process, by definition, pits one priority against another and forces us to make difficult choices among them. However, this approach tends to assume that in the competition for federal dollars, all competing priorities are entitled to some standard of "equity." Since the defense of the nation is an inherently federal responsibility and the fact that all other activities of our nation would essentially cease or be significantly disrupted without a secure national environment, I believe such notions of equitable treatment are fundamentally flawed.

Let's review some other facts. A casual observer of the evolving budget debate could assume that our nation's military has been living high on the hog for several years without regard for the taxpayer and the defense needs of the nation. References to defense getting a "free ride" and must be put "back on the table" are being thrown around with increasing frequency.

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The fact is that defense has been and remains the only function of government that has endured steady and significant reductions over the past decade. For the purpose of this discussion, I believe that the incremental costs of ongoing combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan must be set aside as these are mostly fact-of-life expenses that have traditionally been funded outside of the baseline defense budget.

These reductions have taken many forms. First, the past decade resulted in dramatic reductions in the overall size of the defense establishment in terms of size and funding. This post-Cold War contraction of the U.S. military cut the size of our combat forces essentially in half, while reducing investment in new equipment to historical lows.

I believe there is now bipartisan agreement that, as a nation, we cut back too fast and too deep in the mistaken belief that the collapse of expansionist global communism would usher in a new era of reduced international tension and threats to American interests around the world. Wars in the Persian Gulf, Balkans and other simmering hot spots proved this thesis to be overly optimistic.

Thus, while the geopolitical assumptions didn't work out as planned, our military was pressed to make do and carry out the nation's interests with a reduced set of capabilities. We are still paying for this miscalculation today, particularly given the realities visited upon our shores the morning of September 11, 2001.

That said, I give tremendous credit to the Bush Administration for inheriting a very difficult situation but resolving to make the tough decisions necessary to transform our military into a force more effectively organized and oriented to today's realities. All while having to fight the scourge of international terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq and around the world.

As it has gone through these evolutions, the Department of Defense has been more aggressive and effective in eliminating infrastructure, personnel and programs than any other federal agency, bar none.

- In 1990, DOD had 2 million active-duty personnel in uniform, today it has 1.390 million;
- In 1990, DOD had roughly one million civilian employees, today it has around 660,000. By comparison, non-defense federal civilian employment has stayed largely flat during this same period;
- Since the late 80s, DOD has closed nearly 100 major military installations and is preparing for another significant round of closures next year;
- In the past three years, DOD has cancelled or cut back dozens of major acquisition programs, as detailed in the chart attached to the end of my prepared remarks.

Further, there is a mistaken notion that Congress has been giving the Department of Defense budget a "free ride" since the beginning of this Administration. In fact, the appropriations process has cut the President's baseline budget in each of the past three years for a total of \$8 billion, or by \$17 billion if you count total reductions through rescissions in supplementals.

So, where are things today?

As we meet this afternoon, there are close to 157,000 Americans deployed in Iraq to bring democracy to that troubled country. Another contingent of over 100,000 fresh American troops is starting to flow

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into the Iraqi theater to replace the current force and carry out this difficult duty for the next year. It is entirely likely that this second force will have to be replaced by another in one year and yet another following that.

At the same time, our forces continue to take casualties from a shadowy enemy who is seemingly content to harass and terrorize hoping that it can inflict enough casualties on coalition forces to cause a loss of political support for the operation.

The Pentagon is supporting this conflict based on the resources it asked for and Congress provided through last fall's supplemental appropriations bill. DOD received \$65 billion for this purpose based on the planning assumptions known and used at the time.

But the nature of war, particularly an unconventional war such as the one we face in Iraq, is highly unpredictable and subject to constant change. Thus, it is already apparent that the \$65 billion in supplemental funds Congress provided for fiscal year 04 may not be enough to fully cover the growing costs of this war.

With the fiscal year only half over, the military services are already having to resort to borrowing against normal programs and activities to pay higher priority bills to properly equip and support our troops in the field. I am strongly pushing all of the services to leave no stone unturned and to take every step needed to make sure we push forward all available equipment and technology options to protect our men and women in uniform. But this takes money, and it is clear to me that these expenses are going to continue to grow as the year goes on and the situation on the ground evolves.

Already, the Navy estimates that it is short \$1.6 billion for this purpose. A preliminary similar number from the Army appears to be \$3 billion. And an additional \$1.4 billion is needed by the Army to begin its innovative restructuring plan for the future. The Armed Services Committee has been notified that we will start receiving a steady stream of requests to reprogram a significant amount of funds for the remainder of the year as the services determine how to best rob Peter to pay Paul.

Mr. Chairman, the point here is that war is expensive and the Department of Defense has already started to cannibalize itself to pay these bills. That is exactly what they should be doing because there is no other option but to make sure our soldiers are properly resourced.

I find it surreal that while the military is scrambling to make ends meet and pay for the life-and-death needs of our soldiers in the field, Washington is engaged in this detached debate over whether or not Defense is getting a "free ride" and needs to join other federal claimants on the altar of budget solvency.

To me it's a simple matter of whether or not we are resolved to behave as a nation at war and are willing to muster the sacrifice and conviction to devote the resources necessary to win this war. While some may argue that the amount of funds under consideration for reduction from the President's request is insignificant, its not insignificant to a Department that today is already facing serious budget challenges in getting through the remainder of this year. And it is certainly not insignificant in light of the likelihood that the Department will likely start next fiscal year having dug itself into a serious fiscal hole to make up for the widening gap between available resources and the reality on the ground in Baghdad, Kabul and now Port Au-Prince.

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In closing, I strongly urge you to consider the full and serious impact that any reduction to the President's defense budget request would have on the fiscal challenges facing the Department of Defense and ultimately the war effort. I can assure you that what may make political sense in the minds of some in Washington, will be largely lost on both our brave men and women in uniform and our adversaries who will puzzle over the spectacle of Congress cutting the President's defense budget in the midst of this difficult conflict.

Thank you once again for allowing me to appear and I stand prepared to answer any questions you may have.

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